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April 14 school board meeting moved to Tacoma City Council Chambers for series of votes on revised budget cut proposals

The Board of Directors of Tacoma School District No. 10 will meet in regular session on Thursday, April 14 at 6 p.m. in the Tacoma City Council Chambers on the first floor of the Tacoma Municipal Building, 747 Market St. in Tacoma, Washington.

By relocating to the City Council Chambers, the meeting can air on live television – on Click channel 25 and Comcast channel 26 – throughout Tacoma.

Please note: The board does not take public comment during the first board meeting of each month. The Tacoma City Council chambers seats only 150.

During the study session portion of the meeting, the school board will review a proposed package of \$13 million in budget cuts for the 2011-2012 school year. Over the last two months, the school board and district have engaged more than 2,000 citizens in a series of public meetings and via email on how to deal with a dramatic decrease in state funding.

The district has changed its budget cut proposals based on feedback from citizens. The latest series of cuts includes:

- Closing three low-enrollment elementary schools – McKinley, Wainwright and Franklin – and shifting students to surrounding schools to save \$1.8 million.
- Pursuing administrative budget cuts and operational efficiencies to save \$2 million. The district originally sought to save \$1 million in this area.
- Pursuing an increase to the elementary school class size ratio by 1 student per class to save \$2 million. This budget strategy will require negotiations with the Tacoma Education Association, which represents teachers.
- Cutting more than 50 “unsheltered” positions and programs funded by federal stimulus or one-time funding sources to save \$8 million.
- Spending \$10 million from the district’s savings (fund balance) to offset deeper cuts.

The district has removed from the budget reduction package a series of program relocations:

- Shifting the preschool-through-fifth-grade Montessori program currently at Bryant Elementary School to the Franklin Elementary School site and relocating the sixth-through-

eighth-grade Montessori program currently at Bryant to Geiger. Under this proposal, the Montessori program relocated at Franklin would have opened up the school to approximately 100 more students from the Franklin and Bryant neighborhoods.

- Shifting the several programs – Head Start, Family Literacy, Indian Education, Tone Transitional Center and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program – from the old Madison School site to the Bryant Elementary site. Under this proposal, the district would have vacated and closed the Madison building.
- Shifting the special education and ChildFind programs from the old Park Avenue School property to the McKinley Elementary site. Under this earlier proposal, the district would have vacated and closed the Park Avenue site.

The district removed the proposed program relocations from the latest budget package because none of them affected the district's budget. Differences of opinion among community advocates for the various programs distracted attention from the more significant budget reduction issues.

All the budget documents provided to the board during the meeting will be available for you on the district's Web site: www.tacomashools.org. Just click on the big blue banner that reads "District Budget Outlook."

On that Web site, you will find background documents related to the April 14 board meeting, including detailed charts that show position and program reductions and projected savings.

During the meeting, the board members expect to vote on the proposed budget reductions category by category – administrative cuts and operational efficiencies, unsheltered positions and programs, class size reductions, school closures – rather than as a package.

However, the votes by the board on April 14 will provide guidance to the administration for budget planning purposes only. The school board's official adoption of the district's 2011-2012 school year budget will not occur before July.

According to state law, the district must notify teachers by May 15 if their employment contracts will not be renewed for the next school year. To meet that deadline, the district must estimate student enrollment per school to determine the staffing needs at each school, then apply labor contract provisions to determine teacher assignments and employment status.

The votes on the various budget reduction proposals simply allows the district to meet its legal obligation to estimate staffing needs for the coming school year by the state's deadline.

To officially close a school, the district must follow its policy to conduct two board hearings prior to the board's final vote to close a school. So an affirmative vote of the board on April 14 would authorize the administration to move forward on the next steps in the school closure process as prescribed by district policy. The school board reserves the right to continue hearing from the public on the proposed closures for specific schools and reserves the right to vote differently on any future official school closure.